UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records

THIRD COMMITTEE
11th meeting
held on
Monday, 19 October 1992
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KRENKEL (Austria)

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/47/SR.11
4 November 1992
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

92-57066 6124S (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 93: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

(a) QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (A/47/214-E/1992/50, A/47/216-E/1992/43, A/47/339, A/47/349, A/47/369, A/47/415; A/C.3/47/4)

(b) CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE (A/47/80-S/23502, A/47/87, A/47/88-S/23563, A/47/232-S/24025 and Corr.1, A/47/312-S/24238, A/47/344, A/47/356-S/24367, A/47/379, A/47/381, A/47/391 and A/47/399)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the list of reference documents and opened the debate on agenda item 93 by giving the floor to the first speaker.

2. Mr. GIACOMELLI (Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna) said that that was his first opportunity to address the Committee as Under-Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

3. He drew attention to the role of the United Nations with regard to the social aspect of development. Entrusted under the Charter with the task of "promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom", the Organization today must promote economic efficiency and sustainable growth and, simultaneously, reconcile individual aspirations with the public good, in short, create a society that ensures security and opportunity for advancement for everyone.

4. For many years, the United Nations had focused on international cooperation for economic purposes, while social progress had been seen only as a by-product of economic growth. More recently, however, social issues had come again to the forefront of the Organization's concerns.

5. The hardships experienced by many countries and the economic adjustment efforts made by a number of nations undergoing rapid change had created a sense of social disorientation. There was also an internationalization of social problems - crime, drug trafficking and movements of displaced persons and refugees - as well as greater mobility of people and ideas. Thus, the traditional notion that social problems were domestic issues was losing ground and the transformation of the East-West relationship had also contributed to that. There was no longer the same reluctance to discuss central issues of social policy, such as the role of Government in meeting the needs of society, social services that a Government should provide and the manner in which they should be provided.

6. Under those new conditions, consideration should be given to the role of the Organization in social development. He considered that the United Nations had four functions to carry out in that field: to understand the nature and causes of social processes and identify issues and trends; to define policy options to address emerging issues; to promote agreed policies; and to assist with their implementation at the country level.

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7. In order to discharge those functions effectively, the Organization must convey new ideas grounded in solid facts, hence the importance of information management and policy research. A social early-warning system was essential in order to receive signals about the dangers of a breakdown in social cohesion in the world.

8. Over the past 20 years, the international community had adopted international instruments on a wide spectrum of social issues, including global plans of action, international standards and bilateral and multilateral treaties on social questions. The United Nations had thus succeeded in establishing a solid institutional framework, to which the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs had made a significant contribution. While completing and updating would always be necessary, the emphasis should now be on promotion and implementation of policies at the country level.

9. Unfortunately, a number of difficulties had still prevented the Centre from achieving the expected results. First, the Centre's activities did not always have the unanimous support of Member States. Second, the role of the Centre had not been clearly defined owing to, on the one hand, the essential complexity of social issues and, on the other, the traditional fragmentation of responsibility for social issues in the Secretariat. Third, the Centre's responsibilities should be clearly defined. In that connection, he pointed out that the words "social development and humanitarian affairs" could be found in the names of two other Secretariat departments. Fourth, a number of management issues needed to be addressed in order to mobilize staff and dispel the doubts of those who questioned the relevance of the Centre's activities. The time was more propitious than ever before for enhancing the functioning of a body dealing with social policy.

10. The decision to entrust the Centre with responsibility for all activities pertaining to global social issues, as of 1 January 1993, could be seen as the beginning of the second phase of restructuring, to which the Secretary-General had referred. That consolidation of the Centre's mandate was of key importance because it would make it possible to strengthen the links, on the one hand, between the programmes devoted to various social groups and, on the other hand, between the Centre and the outside, namely the other organizations of the system, national and international development centres, research centres, universities and non-governmental organizations.

11. In the meantime, the Centre was doing its best to deal with its considerable workload. It paid particular attention to making progress in selected areas, such as crime prevention and criminal justice. At the current time, the Centre was preparing to make its contribution to a major event that might have a strong impact on the Organization's future work in the social area, namely the world summit for social development. The Third Committee would soon take action on the recommendation by the Economic and Social Council concerning the summit. If the General Assembly decided to go ahead, the Commission for Social Development, which would hold its thirty-third

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session in Vienna in February in 1993, would have the opportunity to carry out a substantive discussion of the relevant issues. He assured the Committee that the Centre would do everything to provide the Commission with the necessary technical and professional support. In turn, he urged Member States to contribute to the best of their ability to the success of the Commission's work.

12. Social cohesion, threatened in various countries by poverty and socio-economic inequities which in turn led to intolerance, was an issue on which the Centre was currently focusing particular attention. Social justice was important not only for conflict prevention but also for peace-building. It was in that connection that the Centre had been involved in the United Nations protected areas of former Yugoslavia in a social work project aimed at rebuilding trust and promoting reconciliation among the ethnic groups. Similarly, in Cambodia, the Centre was currently providing legal services in order to re-establish law and order and create a fair and humane criminal justice system. The Centre also offered advisory services to newly independent States to help them grapple with the major social problems resulting from their rapid transition to a democratic system and a market economy.

13. Poverty was also an ever-present concern. Although there were many causes of poverty, the Centre was concerned in particular with all the factors that prevented the individual from functioning effectively and productively within the social context. Hence the importance that the Centre attached to self-help. Similarly, the Centre, aware of the structural aspects of discrimination, disadvantage and related poverty, had been directing its efforts at improving the situation of major groups of the population within what might be termed "a society for all". Lastly, recognizing the importance of a dynamic economy, which provided for steadily expanding job opportunities and incomes, the Centre focused on the social factors that underpinned economic activity.

14. In the light of his dual responsibility for both the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, he stressed the link between crime prevention and drug control. He accorded priority to strengthening cooperation between the two programmes. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the new Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice had moreover emphasized at their sessions the need for even closer interlinkages in all areas of mutual interest. Indeed, there was no doubt that drug problems directly affected social well-being and development and were associated with social disintegration and increasing criminality.

15. Social problems were often directly related to each other. Thus, for example, the AIDS epidemic was directly related to drugs, the status of women and prisons. That was why he had set up two working groups to study cross-sectoral issues. The first working group would focus on identifying the

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social processes through which the AIDS epidemic was spreading and on ways to moblize social institutions in combating that scourge and attenuating its impact. The second one would contribute to the preparation of the 1994 Population Conference. Linking social issues to development could contribute to a better understanding of population questions and improve the effectiveness of population programmes.

16. In conclusion, he recalled the major forthcoming events in the social area, namely, the International Year of the Family in 1994, the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders in 1995 and, should the Assembly so decide, the world summit on social development. Those events would provide the occasion to assess achievements so far in the various social areas and to mobilize the political will necessary to take the measures as needed in the years to come. They would also provide opportunities to review ideas and new thinking and to map strategies to strengthen international cooperation for dealing with emerging issues. Although preparing for such events was stimulating, it nevertheless put a very heavy burden on the United Nations as a whole and on the Centre in particular. It was therefore to be hoped that the restructuring of the Secretariat would facilitate the preparation process by making it possible to marshal the limited resources available in support of the major social priority areas indicated by Member States.

17. Mr. SOKALSKI (Director, Social Development Division, United Nations Office at Vienna) said that the seven reports before the Third Committee on issues as diverse as disability, ageing, crime prevention and criminal justice, and cooperatives, indicated just how vast the agenda of the Committee in the area of social development was.

18. The issues relating to disability and ageing had already been widely discussed in the plenary Assembly during the debate marking the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, the tenth anniversary of the World Assembly on Ageing and the International Plan of Action on Ageing. With respect to disability in particular, the basic question of how to ensure an effective shift from awareness-raising to action aimed at creating a society for all by the year 2010 still remained to be answered. Attempts had been made to answer that question at the International Conference of Ministers Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities held at Montreal on 8 and 9 October, and generously hosted by the Government of Canada. Elements for a long-term strategy had been proposed by a special meeting of experts at Vancouver, Canada, in April 1992. Lastly, an Open-ended Working Group had completed draft standard rules in early October in Vienna. The draft standard rules had produced a positive impact on international cooperation in that field and, in that regard, he paid homage to the Chairperson of the Commission for Social Development, Ms. Elsie Mbella Ngomba, for her participation in the work of the Open-ended Working Group.

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19. In the field of ageing, a practical strategy for the next decade was being developed. The distilled essence of a wide-ranging process of consultation within and outside the United Nations system had been drawn together to give the General Assembly, at its International Conference on Ageing held on 15 and 16 October 1992, the basis to provide guidance for the forthcoming decade. The Proclamation on Ageing adopted on that occasion was expected to secure ageing its place on the global agenda in the 1990s in respect of policy formulation, technical cooperation, research and advocacy.

20. The Secretary-General's report, which described world targets with respect to ageing outlined a practical strategy in that regard. However, the success of the strategy would depend on both the continuing support of Member States and the availability of resources. While any mention of resources had to be tempered with caution and restraint, the increase in the international community's reponse to ageing none the less gave some ground for optimism.

21. On the question of youth, the report of the Secretary-General submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 45/103 of 14 December 1990 offered a critical analysis of the implementation of the objectives of International Youth Year. It was clear that young people were currently confronted by daunting problems and that their needs and aspirations were still unfulfilled. There had been a decline in the momentum of the follow-up to the Year. It was therefore hoped that the forthcoming celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Year would provide an occasion for formulating a pragmatic and workable world youth programme of action towards the year 2000. The report contained specific recommendations on ways of achieving that objective during the period 1993-1995. The action contemplated, however, was not enough. The United Nations programme on youth needed to be revitalized. The chance offered in the previous few years by the elimination of political confrontation had not been used enough to invigorate international cooperation in the field of youth. That was a challenge still to be taken up by Member States, youth organizations and the United Nations.

22. On the question on crime prevention and criminal justice, he wished to recall that a new ball game, so to speak, had begun and that, as he had noted the previous year, the United Nations should adopt a new conceptual framework, in view of the magnitude of the problem globally. Since the August 1991 session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Creation of an Effective International Crime and Justice Programme and since the Ministerial Meeting responsible for creating that programme, held at Versailles in November 1991, that conceptual framework, endorsed by the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session, had become reality. The programme was a new one which had been adopted at the recommendation of the first session of the new Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and was intended to be an operational tool in the service of Member States. But in order to become that, countries needed technical assistance in the areas of training, advisory services, and information. They also required a strengthened institutional capacity for programme delivery and increased technical cooperation in its various forms.

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The addition of a new subprogramme on operational activities should facilitate that task, provided that adequate resources were made available. The transnational dimensions of contemporary criminality required a transnational response. That was the raison d'être of the new crime prevention and criminal justice programme which called for close collaboration not only between States but also between all other relevant bodies. As the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna had pointed out, the need for such cooperation had already been felt by the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, both of which had expressed their intention to cooperate with the new Commission in matters of common concern. Similarly, strengthened cooperation with the international professional community should be of mutual benefit and should enhance the operation of the criminal justice network as a whole. But that, too, would require an adequate level of resources, especially for the African Institute, as pointed out in the report on that question before the Committee.

23. As Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, which would be observed in 1994, he informed the Committee that 40 countries had already established coordinating committees for the Year and several others had taken steps in that direction. In addition, arrangements for the holding of four regional preparatory meetings on the Year - at Tunis, for Africa and Western Asia; at Bogota, for Latin America and the Caribbean; at Valleta, Malta, for Europe and North America; and at Beijing, for Asia and the Pacific - were near finalization. It was worth noting that two of the regional commissions, ESCAP and ESCWA, had already adopted special resolutions on their preparations for the Year. The increasing interest in the Year expressed by international non-governmental organizations had given rise to the idea, which was taking shape, of convening a world NGOs forum on families in 1994. Within the United Nations system, the second ad hoc inter-agency meeting on the Year, held in March 1992, had provided the occasion to develop common strategies and to identify several projects for joint action. On the recommendation of the meeting, the Joint United Nations Information Committee had decided to set up, in 1993, a working group to develop joint activities. Notwithstanding its resource constraints, the International Year of the Family secretariat had initiated numerous activities, including a promotional and information campaign. In addition to various other publications on substantative family issues, the secretariat had instituted special testimonials to persons and organizations that were patrons of the Year. Also, the United Nations Sales Section had brought out a few promotional products and the UNICEF Greeting Card Operation was also preparing a series of promotional items. Lastly, the secretariat for the Year had continued its fund-raising campaign, particularly covering the private sector, the business community and, naturally, Governments. Although the response from Governments had been modest so far, the secretariat was nevertheless grateful to the Governments of the major donor countries, such as Canada, Finland, France, Germany and Portugal, which had made various contributions to the Year. He also wished to acknowledge the generosity of the business and professional leaders in Hong Kong, who had made a significant financial contribution to the secretariat. While the progress

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made had been encouraging, it should not obscure the daunting tasks ahead. He therefore appealed to all delegations to use their influence to generate action in their respective countries to ensure the effective preparation of the Year and to report on the status of those preparations.

24. In July 1992 the Economic and Social Council had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the status and role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends and, on that subject, had adopted resolution 1992/25, which reflected the very positive reception given to the report in the Council. The resolution also urged the pursuit of action in that field, particularly at the grass-roots level. In that connection, he wished to draw the attention of members of the Third Committee, particularly the sponsors of resolution 1992/25, to paragraph 7 of the resolution, which did not indicate when the following report of the Secretary-General should be prepared nor to what organ it should be submitted.

25. He wished to recall, in conclusion, that the thirty-third session of the Commission for Social Development would convene at Vienna in 1993. The agenda of the Commission was a particularly heavy one. The Economic and Social Council resolution on the World Summit for Social Development, for example, had entrusted the Commission with specific tasks. He wished to recall, in that connection, that the frequency and duration of the Commission's sessions did not allow it to cope fully with the heavy agenda of items entrusted to it. That problem deserved special attention. Lastly, he wished to raise the question of the resource base of the United Nations for programme activities and to quote, in that connection, the warning of the Secretary-General, which applied directly to the situation in the field of social development. In "An agenda for peace", the Secretary-General had written: "A chasm has developed between the tasks entrusted to this Organization and the financial means provided to it. The truth of the matter is that our vision cannot really extend to the prospect opening before us as long as our financing remains myopic".

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.